CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 11 March 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Grecu (Romania)

GE.97-60535 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 759th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me at the outset to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Her Excellency Lena Hjelm-Wallén, who will be our first speaker today. We had the privilege of receiving the visit of the Foreign Minister of Sweden last year, and her presence among us today is a further testimony of her personal interest in our work and the abiding importance attached by her Government to the Conference on Disarmament. I am sure that her statement will be followed with great interest by all of us.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Her Excellency Lena Hjelm-Wallén.

Mrs. HJELM-WALLEN (Sweden): Mr. President, may I first of all congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the CD? I would also like to pay my respects to the Secretary-General, Vladimir Petrovsky, and his deputy, Mr. Bensmail, and express our gratitude for the assistance they provide members and observers to the CD.

Profound changes in the security environment have created radically new and positive conditions for building a safer and more secure world. It is not possible to build a sustainable security order and lasting peace on the threat of weapons of mass destruction. The quest for a nuclear-weapon-free world is about fundamental values and political will. It is about the world we want to create for ourselves and future generations, a world where the destructive power of these weapons no longer threatens our civilization.

On 10 September 1996, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by an overwhelming majority and opened it for signature. The Treaty was signed on the very first day by all the five nuclear-weapon States. I had the great pleasure to sign it that day, too, on behalf of Sweden. To date, the Treaty has more than 140 signatory States.

The CTBT constitutes a landmark event in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The solid support for the Treaty testifies to the strong will of the international community to put an end to all nuclear weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosion. It confirms that nuclear weapons, pyschologically and politically, have become yesterday's weapons.

We must now ensure the early entry into force of the Treaty. The CTBT was negotiated here in the Conference on Disarmament. I urge those States in the CD that have not already done so to shoulder their responsibility and to sign the Treaty as soon as possible.

The Swedish Government welcomes the results of the resumed first session of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. The decisions taken last week here in Geneva have laid the necessary groundwork for beginning the work in Vienna. Sweden intends to

actively contribute to this work, and I am pleased that Dr. Ola Dahlman has been appointed Chairman of the Working Group in charge of verification issues under the PrepCom.

The CD should now start negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, the cut-off. This is the next urgent task. Already in 1995, the Conference adopted a statement containing a mandate for cut-off negotiations. It also decided to establish an ad hoc committee for this purpose.

The time has now come to proceed to substantive work. I urge all delegations to show the necessary flexibility to get these negotiations started without further delay. It is highly important that the CD meet the expectations placed on it by the international community.

The "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament" adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference also call for the immediate commencement and early conclusion of such negotiations. A cut-off treaty would once and for all put a cap on the fissile material available for weapons purposes. It would create further favourable conditions for the reduction of nuclear arsenals. Such a treaty is thus of the highest significance both for continued nuclear disarmament and for nuclear non-proliferation.

Significant steps have been taken in the field of nuclear disarmament. I have in mind the INF Treaty, the START I and II agreements. The nuclear-weapon States have, furthermore, taken important unilateral measures. However, the existing nuclear arsenals are still greatly disproportionate to any actual or conceivable threats. The nuclear disarmament process must therefore continue unabated.

The nuclear-weapon States have, indeed, a great responsibility. A situation where these States insist on the security benefits of nuclear weapons, while reserving to themselves the right to possess such weapons, is not sustainable.

START II should be ratified without delay. This would enable its implementation and pave the way for additional deep reductions of the United States and Russian nuclear arsenals, which in turn would create a basis for the participation of all the nuclear-weapon States in the reduction process. The Swedish Government urges the United States and Russia to spare no efforts to overcome the present difficulties and proceed towards a START III. We hope that the summit meeting later this month between President Clinton and President Yeltsin will give an important impetus to this process.

In August last year, the Canberra Commission delivered its report. The Government of Australia subsequently circulated it in the United Nations General Assembly. It was also presented to the CD earlier this year by the Foreign Minister of Australia, Mr. Alexander Downer.

(Mrs. Hjelm-Wallén, Sweden)

The importance of the Commission's report is that it sets out a way forward through a series of concrete measures towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. These are measures to be taken by the nuclear-weapon States, as well as by the international community. Furthermore they are mutually supportive and can be pursued in parallel. I propose that the CD devote some of its time during this year's session to the consideration of this report. The proposals contained in the report deserve to be explored.

One step proposed by the Canberra Commission is to take nuclear forces off alert. This step could and should be taken immediately by the nuclear-weapon States. Such a measure would greatly reduce the risk of an accidental or unauthorized nuclear weapons launch. It would also constitute an important confidence-building measure. Furthermore, it would facilitate the implementation of another of the Commission's proposals, namely, to remove nuclear warheads from their delivery vehicles.

Sweden believes it would be useful to establish some mechanism within the CD to discuss broader aspects of nuclear disarmament. This could be in the form of an ad hoc committee or a special coordinator or informal plenary meetings devoted to this subject. The form is not important. What matters is to have some kind of mechanism which enables a focused discussion on these issues.

The Swedish Government attaches great importance to the upcoming preparatory work for the next NPT Review Conference in the year 2000. The annual PrepCom meetings will provide an opportunity to review on a regular basis the implementation of the Treaty. However, the work must also be forward-looking.

In particular, the concept of systematic and progressive efforts by the nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons, must be given a concrete content. The steps must be identified and fully translated into action.

In July last year, the International Court of Justice expressed itself in an advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. It did so at the request of the United Nations General Assembly. The Court stated, inter alia, that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control". This unanimous conclusion by the Court constitutes a strong and clear message.

I also wish to draw attention to the recent joint statement made by some 60 retired high-ranking military officers from the United States, Russia and other countries. They stressed that present and planned stockpiles of nuclear weapons are exceedingly large and should now be greatly cut back. Remaining nuclear weapons should be gradually and transparently taken off alert. Long-term international nuclear policy must be based on the declared principle of continuous, complete and irrevocable elimination of nuclear weapons.

(Mrs. Hjelm-Wallén, Sweden)

Their statement is highly significant, not only because of its content but also because of the persons who stand behind the message. It is an important call for intensified efforts towards nuclear disarmament.

Important developments are now taking place in the non-nuclear fields. On 29 April, the Chemical Weapons Convention, negotiated in this forum, will enter into force. This Convention will prohibit an entire category of weapons of mass destruction and provide for the destruction of these weapons. It is a deplorable fact that the United States and Russia - the two declared possessors of chemical weapons - have not yet ratified the Convention. The absence of their ratifications would limit this important international treaty to a non-proliferation regime. This would not be compatible with its overall objective to erase a whole class of weapons of mass destruction from the face of the Earth and could also jeopardize further progress in other areas of disarmament and non-proliferation. The Swedish Government strongly urges the United States and Russia to shoulder their responsibility and ratify the Convention before its entry into force.

The Swedish Government welcomes the fact that work has now started on the elaboration of a verification regime for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. This is a highly important step for the strengthening of this Convention. The negotiations in the Ad Hoc Group charged with this task should proceed as swiftly as possible. They should aim at the conclusion of the work in 1998.

By their very nature, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction must be accorded highest priority on the international disarmament agenda. But we must also deal with the fact that every year tens of thousands of persons fall victim to conventional weapons. Anti-personnel landmines belong to this category. We all know the disastrous effects of the use of these weapons.

For the last 15 years, Sweden has neither exported nor produced anti-personnel landmines. Furthermore, Sweden decided last year to prohibit the use of anti-personnel landmines by its armed forces and to destroy its stocks of such mines as soon as possible, but no later than the year 2001.

The international community can no longer permit that civilians - women, men and children - are killed by the thousands every year by these hideous weapons. Nor can it permit that even more victims become disabled for life, often condemned to long suffering and social hardship. Nor can it allow entire countries or regions to become economically paralysed by the vast presence of landmines in their fields and roads. The only effective solution to the landmine crisis is a total ban on APLs. No more, no less.

The international community must spare no efforts to achieve a comprehensive, effective and legally binding international ban, covering production, stockpiling, transfers and use. Partial measures will not solve the problem. We must aim for a total prohibition, and we must achieve this objective as soon as possible. This process should involve the broadest possible range of States, including States particularly plagued by the use of

(Mrs. Hjelm-Wallén, Sweden)

these mines, producers and exporters. Sweden will work actively in all suitable forums. We participate in the Ottawa Process and are ready to do so in the CD.

While working towards a total ban, it is, at the same time, of utmost importance that States adhere to the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. This Protocol places significant new restrictions on the use of all landmines. By standing firmly behind the Protocol, the international community will take an important stride forward in dealing with the scourge of the indiscriminate use of these mines. Last week, the Swedish Government took the decision to submit to Parliament the bill on Sweden's ratification of the amended Protocol. The ratification is foreseen to take place before the end of June.

The international community must also tackle the problem of the approximately 100 million landmines already deployed. It faces, indeed, a humanitarian demining task of gigantic proportions. Ongoing efforts in this field are far too slow, costly and dangerous. New and more efficient methods must be developed. The Swedish Government has decided to establish, later this year, a demining centre which will contribute to international demining efforts and be a focal point for research on, and development of, new demining techniques.

The international community must, furthermore, significantly increase its resources for mine awareness programmes and victim assistance. These are tasks which call for urgent action and to which undivided attention and energy must be devoted.

The existing window of opportunity for carrying the disarmament process forward must be utilized to the fullest extent possible. Work must proceed with a sense of urgency. The CD has an important role to play. This Conference has, indeed, proven its value. The Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are impressive achievements in recent years.

Important tasks lie ahead. The CD is already several months into its 1997 session. Political will must now be demonstrated and substantive work started.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden for her important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none.

I intend to hold informal open-ended Presidential consultations immediately after this plenary meeting.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held next Thursday, 13 March at 10 a.m. We shall meet in an informal setting after a 10-minute break.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.